



The Free Congress Commentary
Watch For Good Things From The RSC
By Paul M. Weyrich

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Elections Mark A Start, Not An
Ending

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Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN) is no finger-in-the-wind politician. Pence operates from a firm set of conservative principles; he does not do that which is simply expedient and momentarily advantageous politically. During my years in Washington conservatives have had their fair share of principled legislators in Congress. Not all were effective. They held the right views but lacked the leadership skills and organizing capability to have a true impact on legislation. Pence, however, appears to offer the gift of leadership, a conservative House Member, with the potential to have a substantial impact upon the legislative process and, therefore, is well worth watching.

I must confess that I feel a special kinship with Pence. He is an attorney by profession and made two unsuccessful runs for the House seat held by the politically adroit, liberal legislator Phil Sharp (D). Control of the seat eventually switched to the GOP. When GOP incumbent David McIntosh decided to run for Governor in 2000, Pence succeeded him.

What Pence and I have in common is that we share a background as radio talk show hosts. Pence hosted a weekday program that was carried throughout Indiana.

What made Pence such a good talk show host are exactly the same qualities that make him effective as a legislator. He is a thoughtful conservative who addresses issues from principle; no conservative can accuse him of having his priorities wrong. Pence describes himself as "a Christian, a conservative and a Republican" in that order. He does not talk the loudest or make the biggest promises but his straight-from-the-shoulder common-sense thinking can carry the day based on its logic and sincerity. People like him and trust him. They realize that Pence is not just handing them a line but truly means what he says.

Pence assumed the chairmanship of the Republican Study Committee (RSC) last fall. The RSC is the organization of conservative-minded legislators in the House. It was formed in the 1970s only to have its funding cut off when the House Republicans gained the majority in 1994 and suspended funding for all legislative service organizations. Soon the House conservatives formed a Conservative Action Team (CATs) and

members paid for it out of their budgets. CATs led the battles on behalf of conservative principles on a number of issues. The name was changed in 2000 to the Republican Study Committee. The organization's mission remains the same as that of its predecessor. Many good conservatives have chaired the RSC over the years but Pence is bringing a calibrated aggressiveness to his role as chairman that is very much needed.

Pence stands out as a conservative House member who has not been silent as one big-budget appropriations bill after another has passed the House. He was a critic of the Medicare Prescription Drug Law and remains so to this day because he believes that it could plunge our nation into bankruptcy. He opposed No Child Left Behind legislation because of its cost and because he believes that micro-managing education is not a responsibility of the Federal Government.

When the new session of Congress started, Pence and the RSC led the fight to have the Republican Conference adopt reforms to the budget process. Unfortunately the reforms fell to defeat but Pence and the RSC are undeterred. Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-KS) will be one of several GOP House Members who will be leading the fight on behalf of limited government. Tiahrt is the House sponsor of the "Commission on the Accountability and Review of Federal Agencies" (CARFA), legislation that would establish a commission to review the work of Federal agencies and recommend elimination of those that are unnecessary. The Senate sponsor of CARFA is Sen. Sam Brownback (R-KS). Their idea is starting to gain more support as conservatives see study after study detailing the explosive growth in Federal spending. (Another bill that will be promoted is Rep. Kevin Brady's bill to establish sunsets on federal agencies.)

Pence told *Human Events'* John Gizzi, "After four years of the largest growth in entitlement and discretionary spending in more than a half-century, we must rediscover the principles of limited government that brought our party to power in 1980 and 1994 and put them into practice. This requires that House conservatives have their own agenda, built on the principles of freedom, including not only what conservatives must do in the 109th Congress, but also what they must undo."

In order to curtail soaring Federal spending the RSC will also promote proposals to enact a Balanced Budget Amendment and reforms to the Federal budget process, including a line-item veto. The RSC wants to uphold any presidential veto of a spending bill in excess of the budget. Rep. Chris Cox (R-CA) is working to recruit support for this from among his fellow Members of Congress. RSC also plans to call for efforts on behalf of protecting marriage, as well as the First Amendment Restoration Act, a bill sponsored by Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD) which would overturn the provision of the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform (aka McCain-Feingold), which restricts free speech by limiting the ability of organizations to purchase advertising in the days leading up to a primary or general election.

Pence has made clear his interest in improving coordination and outreach among conservatives. For the first time ever, the House conservatives' retreat included invitations to Senate conservatives. There is hope that several conservative Senators will attend the retreat in early February. Pence wants to be more aggressive in placing conservative House Members on talk radio and television news programs. Pence

knows the important role that grassroots organizations can play in passing or stopping legislation and he has made clear that he wants the RSC to work more closely with grassroots conservative groups on important issues such as reining in Federal spending.

Pence is exactly the right conservative to lead the fights that must be fought over spending and the budget; for tax cuts; for preserving marriage as a contract exclusively between a man and a woman; and on behalf of free speech. He should be able to provide the requisite mix of common sense and commitment to principle with the willingness to take bold stands and not back down. If Pence lives up to his potential as a leader-- and he has my vote of confidence -- then a few years down the road we may very well be thankful that he was leading the RSC at exactly the time when strong leadership on behalf of fiscal restraint and important issues regarding traditional American values was truly needed.

Paul M. Weyrich is Chairman and CEO of the Free Congress Foundation.